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978-0-521-85699-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance

Edited by George Hutchinson

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The Harlem Renaissance (1918–37) was the most influential single movement in African American literary history. Its key figures include W. E. B. Du Bois, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes. The movement laid the groundwork for all later African American literature, and had an enormous impact on later black literature worldwide. With chapters by a wide range of well-known scholars, this Companion is an authoritative and engaging guide to the movement. It first discusses the historical contexts of the Harlem Renaissance, both national and international; then presents original discussions of a wide array of authors and texts; and finally treats the reputation of the movement in later years. Giving full play to the disagreements and differences that energized the renaissance, this Companion presents the best of current wisdom as well as a set of new readings encouraging further exploration of this dynamic field.

GEORGE HUTCHINSON is Chairman of the Department of English and Booth Tarkington Professor of Literary Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington.

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GEORGE HUTCHINSON  
*Indiana University*



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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CARLA KAPLAN is the Davis Distinguished Professor of American Literature at Northeastern University. She has published five books, including, most recently, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (Doubleday, 2002), which was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award and was listed as a notable book and best book of the year by *The New York Times* and *New York* magazine, and a Norton Critical edition of Nella Larsen's *Passing* which is forthcoming in 2007. Her next book, *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance*, will be published by HarperCollins. Kaplan is the recipient of grants and fellowships from the NEH, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library's Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, and the Guggenheim Foundation, among others.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Press, 1990), and *American Studies: A Source Book* (Akademisk Forlag, 1989, 1993). He has also been an editor of *American Studies in Scandinavia*.

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JAMES SMETHURST is an Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He is the author of *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930–1946* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005). He is also the co-editor of *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and *Radicalism in the South since Reconstruction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). He is currently working on a study of African American literature and culture from 1880 to 1918 and ideas of artistic modernity and modernism in the United States.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

edited the exhibition catalogue *Paul Robeson: Artist and Citizen* (Rutgers University Press, 1998). Currently, he is finishing a biography of Alain Locke.

CHERYL A. WALL, Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University, is author of *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Indiana University Press, 1995) and *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005). She edited two volumes of writing by Zora Neale Hurston for the Library of America, as well as critical casebooks on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and “Sweat.” Her current scholarship focuses on the art and legacy of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison’s career as editor, and the African American essay.

MARK WHALAN is a Lecturer in American Literature and Culture at the University of Exeter. He is the editor of *The Letters of Jean Toomer, 1919–1924* (University of Tennessee Press, 2006), and the author of *Race, Manhood and Modernism in America: The Short Story Cycles of Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer* (University of Tennessee Press, forthcoming) and *Soldiers of Democracy: The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (University Press of Florida, forthcoming).

MICHAEL A. CHANEY

CHRONOLOGY

A chronology of Harlem Renaissance artists and writers

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963)  
 James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938)  
 Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875–1935)  
 Angelina W. Grimké (1880–1958)  
 Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964)  
 Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882–1961)  
 Anne Spencer (1882–1975)  
 Alain LeRoy Locke (1886–1954)  
 Marcus Garvey (1887–1940)  
 Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960)  
 Nella Larsen (1891–1964)  
 Claude McKay (1891–1948)  
 Walter White (1893–1955)  
 Jean Toomer (1894–1967)  
 George Samuel Schuyler (1895–1977)  
 Marion Vera Cuthbert (1896–1989)  
 Florence Mills (1896–1927)  
 Rudolph Fisher (1897–1934)  
 Marita Bonner (1898–1971)  
 Aaron Douglas (1898–1979)  
 Paul Robeson (1898–1976)  
 Eric Walrond (1898–1966)  
 Sterling Allen Brown (1901–89)  
 Gwendolyn B. Bennett (1902–81)  
 Arna Bontemps (1902–73)  
 Langston Hughes (1902–67)  
 Wallace Thurman (1902–34)  
 Countee Cullen (1903–46)  
 Josephine Baker (1906–75)  
 Richard Bruce Nugent (1906–87)  
 Dorothy West (1907–98)

## CHRONOLOGY

A chronology of significant events and publications  
 of the Harlem Renaissance

## 1919

- 369th Regiment, or the “Harlem Hellfighters,” marches up Fifth Avenue to Harlem, February.
- W. E. B. Du Bois’ First Pan-African Congress meets in Paris, February.
- Marcus Garvey founds the Black Star Shipping Line, June.
- Race riots erupt in various cities, including Charleston, Knoxville, Washington, DC, Chicago, and Omaha, June to September.
- Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) founded, September.
- Oscar Micheaux releases his first film, *The Homesteader*, in Chicago.
- Publication of Benjamin Brawley’s *The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States*.

## 1920

- The Negro National League, the first of baseball’s “Negro leagues,” is established, January.
- 18th Amendment (Prohibition) takes effect, January.
- Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) convention held at Madison Square Garden, August.
- 19th Amendment (Women’s Suffrage) passed.
- Actor Charles Gilpin stars in O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*, opening at the Provincetown Playhouse, November.
- James Weldon Johnson becomes executive secretary of the NAACP and its first black officer, December.
- Publication of W. E. B. Du Bois’ *Darkwater* and Claude McKay’s *Spring in New Hampshire*.

## 1921

- Black Swan Phonograph Corporation founded by Harry Pace, March.
- *Shuffle Along*, the first musical written and performed by African Americans Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, opens on Broadway at the David Belasco Theater, May.
- African American artists, including Henry Tanner and Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, exhibit work at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library.
- Race riots in Tulsa, June.

## CHRONOLOGY

- Second Pan-African Congress meets in London, Brussels, and Paris, August and September.
- Marcus Garvey founds African Orthodox Church, September.
- Publication of Benjamin Brawley's *Social History of the American Negro*, Blaise Cendrars' *Anthologie nègre*, and René Maran, *Batouala*.

## 1922

- Bessie Coleman becomes the first African American woman to stage a public flight, September.
- House of Representatives, led by L. C. Dyer of Missouri, approves first Anti-Lynching bill, but it is defeated by Southern Senators who filibuster for twenty-one days, December.
- Meta Warrick Fuller exhibits her sculpture "Ethiopia Awakening" in New York.
- Publication of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* edited by James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows* and Georgia Douglas Johnson's *Bronze: A Book of Verse*.

## 1923

- Third Pan-African Congress meets in London and Lisbon, January.
- National Urban League publishes *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* with Charles S. Johnson as editor, January.
- National Ethiopian Art Players stage Willis Richardson's *The Chip Woman's Fortune*, the first serious play by a black writer on Broadway, May.
- Claude McKay delivers his "Report on the Negro Question" before the Fourth Congress of the Third International in Moscow, June.
- Marcus Garvey is sentenced to five years in prison for mail fraud, June.
- The Cotton Club opens, September.
- Publication of Marcus Garvey's two-volume *Philosophy and Opinion of Marcus Garvey* and Jean Toomer's *Cane*.

## 1924

- *Opportunity* magazine's Civic Club Dinner, March. Touted by literary historians as the inaugural event of the New Negro movement, the dinner symbolizes a merger of white publishers and black writers.
- Actor Paul Robeson appears in O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, May.
- "Dixie to Broadway," an all-black musical revue, premieres at the Broadhurst Theater in New York City, October.

## CHRONOLOGY

- First prize in the Witter Bynner Poetry Competition goes to Countee Cullen.
- Publication of Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion*, Walter White's *The Fire in the Flint*, W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Gift of Black Folk*, and Marcus Garvey's *Aims and Objects for a Solution of the Negro Problem Outlined*.

## 1925

- Marcus Garvey is convicted of mail fraud and jailed in the Atlanta Penitentiary, February.
- Publication of Alain Locke and Charles Johnson's special issue of *Survey Graphic*, "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," featuring black writers, March.
- A. Philip Randolph organizes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, May.
- Negro Literary and Historical Society opens at 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, May 7. The same day, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carl Van Vechten, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Ridgely Torrence, and Arthur Spingarn meet to discuss formation of the Krigwa Players, to be based at the library.
- The first literary awards sponsored by *Opportunity* go to Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston, May.
- Josephine Baker debuts on the Parisian stage in *La Revue Nègre*, July.
- At the first *Crisis* awards ceremony held at the Renaissance Casino (a mecca of upscale African American nightlife), Countee Cullen wins first prize, November.
- Zora Neale Hurston enters Barnard College.
- American Negro Labor Congress meets in Chicago, October.
- First full-length Broadway play by an African American, Garland Anderson's *Appearances*, opens at the Frolic Theatre on Broadway, October.
- Paul Robeson makes his feature film debut in Oscar Micheaux's *Body and Soul*, November.
- Wallace Thurman moves from Los Angeles to New York.
- Publication of Countee Cullen's *Color*, DuBose Heyward's *Porgy*, Alain Locke's *The New Negro*, and *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* edited by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson.

## 1926

- Countee Cullen accepts position as Assistant Editor of *Opportunity* and writes a regular column entitled "The Dark Tower."

## CHRONOLOGY

- First celebration of Negro History Week, February.
- Savoy Ballroom, where many of the period's jazz dance crazes originate, opens in Harlem, March.
- Carnegie Corporation purchases Arthur Schomburg's collection for the New York Public Library, October.
- Harmon Foundation sponsors its first annual African American art exhibition at the New York Public Library, awarding works by Palmer Hayden and Hale Woodruff.
- *Crisis* awards go to Arna Bontemps' poem "Nocturne at Bethesda," Countee Cullen's poem "Thoughts in a Zoo," Aaron Douglas's painting "African Chief," and a portrait by Hale Woodruff.
- Publication of Wallace Thurman's *Fire!!*, Langston Hughes' *The Weary Blues*, Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*, W. C. Handy's *Blues: An Anthology*, and Walter White's *Flight*.

## 1927

- Manager Abe Saperstein forms the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team, January.
- Paul Green's drama *In Abraham's Bosom*, which had an all-black cast, wins the Pulitzer Prize, May.
- Fourth Pan-African Congress held in New York.
- Ethel Waters first appears on Broadway in the all-black revue *Africana*, July.
- Dorothy and DuBose Heyward's play *Porgy* opens on Broadway, September.
- By order of President Calvin Coolidge, Marcus Garvey's sentence is commuted and he is deported to Jamaica, December.
- Duke Ellington begins playing at the Cotton Club, December.
- A'Lelia Walker, renowned as hostess and "joy goddess" of the Renaissance, designs a tearoom salon called "The Dark Tower" after Cullen's column in *Opportunity*, which opens officially in early 1928.
- Publication of Miguel Covarrubias' *Negro Drawings*, Countee Cullen's *Ballad of the Brown Girl*, *Copper Sun*, and *Caroling Dusk*, Arthur Fauset's *For Freedom: A Biographical Story of the American Negro*, Langston Hughes' *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (reprint of the 1912 edition), and *Plays of Negro Life*, edited by Alain Locke and Montgomery T. Gregory.

## CHRONOLOGY

## 1928

- Archibald Motley exhibits paintings at the New Galleries in New York and becomes the first artist of any race to appear on the cover of the *New York Times*, February.
- On April 9, Countee Cullen marries Nina Yolande, daughter of W. E. B. Du Bois, in what is described as one of the most lavish weddings in New York history; they divorce in 1930.
- Wallace Thurman edits *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life*, a short-lived, literary magazine like *Fire!!*, with illustrations by Aaron Douglas and Richard Bruce Nugent, November.
- Publication of W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Dark Princess*, Rudolph Fisher's *The Walls of Jericho*, Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*.

## 1929

- The Negro Experimental Theatre formed at 135th Street branch library, February, directed by Regina M. Anderson and Dorothy Peterson.
- Wallace Thurman's play *Harlem*, written with William Rapp, opens at the Apollo Theater on Broadway, February.
- "Paintings and Sculptures by American Negro Artists," an exhibition sponsored by the Harmon Foundation, is held at the National Gallery in Washington, DC, May.
- Negro Art Theatre founded, June.
- National Colored Players founded, September.
- Stock Exchange crashes on Black Thursday, October 29.
- Publication of Countee Cullen's *The Black Christ and Other Poems*, Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun*, Claude McKay's *Banjo*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*, and Walter White's *Rope and Faggot: The Biography of Judge Lynch*.

## 1930

- *The Green Pastures*, a musical with an all-black cast, opens on Broadway, February.
- NAACP successfully contests President Hoover's nomination of renowned racist John J. Parker to the Supreme Court, March.
- Sufi Abdul Hamid founds the Universal Holy Temple of Tranquillity in Harlem.
- Black Muslim founder Wallace Fard Muhammad opens the Islam Temple in Detroit, July.

## CHRONOLOGY

- Agatha Scott, wife of Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., founds the Northeasterners, Inc., an elite black women's social club.
- Colored Merchants' Association (founded in Alabama, 1928) spreads to Harlem.
- *La Revue du Monde Noir* founded in Paris.
- Publication of Randolph Edmonds' *Shades and Shadows*, Charles S. Johnson's *The Negro in American Civilization: A Study of Negro Life and Race Relations*, James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan*, and Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*.

## 1931

- The Scottsboro trial runs from April through July.
- Publication of Arna Bontemps' *God Sends Sunday*, Jessie Fauset's *The Chinaberry Tree*, Langston Hughes' *Dear Lovely Death*, *The Negro Mother*, and *Scottsboro Limited*, Vernon Loggins' *The Negro Author: His Development in America to 1900*, George S. Schuyler's *Black No More*, and Jean Toomer's *Essentials*.

## 1932

- Twenty young black intellectuals, including Dorothy West, Langston Hughes, and group leader Louise Thompson, sail to Russia to make the film *Black and White*, June.
- Sculptor Augusta Savage opens her first Savage School of Arts and Crafts in Harlem.
- Blacks begin to desert the Republican Party in large numbers.
- Publication of Sterling Brown's *Southern Road*, Countee Cullen's *One Way to Heaven*, Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure Man Dies*, Langston Hughes' *The Dream Keeper*, Claude McKay's *Gingertown*, George Schuyler's *Slaves Today*, and Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring*.

## 1933

- Dudley Murphy releases the film *The Emperor Jones* starring Paul Robeson.
- NAACP launches a campaign against segregation with a suit against University of North Carolina School of Pharmacy, March.
- Future Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. leads a demonstration for better health care in Harlem, April.
- Publication of Jessie Fauset's *Comedy*, *American Style*, James Weldon Johnson's *Along This Way*, and Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom*.



## CHRONOLOGY

## 1934

- W. E. B. Du Bois resigns from *The Crisis* and NAACP after disagreements with NAACP secretary Walter White and a marked shift toward separatism in Du Bois' editorials, January.
- *Challenge* magazine founded by Dorothy West and friends.
- No longer presenting burlesque shows, the Apollo Theater showcases African American musicians and accepts African American patrons for the first time, January.
- Led by Howard Law School Dean Charles Houston, the NAACP and the American Fund for Public Service campaign against segregation and discrimination, October.
- Oscar Micheaux releases the film *Harlem after Midnight*.
- Sponsored by the PWA, Aaron Douglas paints four murals for the New York Public Library entitled *Aspects of Negro Life*, completed by November.
- Rudolph Fisher and Wallace Thurman die, December.
- Publication of Arna Bontemps' *You Can't Pet a Possum*, Randolph Edmonds' *Six Plays for the Negro Theatre*, Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, James Weldon Johnson's *Negro Americans: What Now?*, George Lee's *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began*, and *Negro: An Anthology*, edited by Nancy Cunard.

## 1935

- The Harlem Race Riot erupts over discriminatory employment policies of white-owned businesses, March.
- The Museum of Modern Art opens the landmark exhibition *African Negro Art*, March.
- *Porgy and Bess*, the opera with an all-black cast, opens on Broadway, October.
- Langston Hughes' *Mulatto* becomes the first full-length play by a black writer to open on Broadway, October.
- Fifty per cent of Harlem's families are reportedly unemployed.
- Carl Van Vechten holds his first exhibition of photographs in *The Leica Exhibition* at Bergdorf Goodman in New York.
- Publication of Countee Cullen's *The Medea and Other Poems*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, George Wylie Henderson's *Ollie Miss*, and Willis Richardson and May Sullivan's *Negro History in Thirteen Plays*.

## CHRONOLOGY

## 1936

- Oscar Micheaux releases his film *Temptation*.
- Aaron Douglas paints murals for the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas, formal dedication in June.
- Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Olympics in Berlin, August.
- Paul Robeson and Hattie McDaniel appear in James Whale's film musical *Show Boat*.
- Publication of Arna Bontemps' *Black Thunder*.

## 1937

- Paul Robeson stars in the film *King Solomon's Mines*.
- Joe Louis defeats James J. Braddock to become heavyweight boxing champion of the world, June.
- Publication of Claude McKay's *Long Way from Home*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Sterling A. Brown's *The Negro in American Fiction*.
- *Challenge* magazine revived as *New Challenge*, carrying Richard Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing."

## 1938

- Richmond Barthé completes his *Dance* reliefs for the Harlem River Housing Project in New York.
- Jacob Lawrence holds his first solo exhibition at the Harlem YMCA and completes his *Toussaint l'Ouverture* series, February.
- Langston Hughes' play "Don't You Want to be Free?" marks the opening of the Harlem Suitcase Theatre, April.
- James Weldon Johnson dies in an automobile accident.
- Publication of Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*, an anthropological study of Jamaican and Haitian culture, and of Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*.

## 1939

- New York World's Fair features Augusta Savage's sculpture "The Harp," April.
- Publication of Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses: Man of the Mountain*.

## CHRONOLOGY

1940

- Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., becomes the first black general in the United States Army, October.
- Publication of Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea*, Claude McKay's *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, and Alain Locke's *The Negro in Art*.

(Information for the above chronology has been compiled from a number of sources, particularly Kellner's *Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era* and Watson's *The Harlem Renaissance*.)